

MONTGOMERY SCHOOLS

Restaurant Fundraiser A McShock For Official

By LOUI ARADANI
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Call it the Big Mac Mement.

It happened Thursday about a half-hour into a routine Montgomery County Council committee meeting on food marketing in the school system. Aneena Batada, co-author of a report by the Center for Science in the Public Interest, was briefing council members.

"And at the McTeacher's Night, teachers actually go and work behind the register," she said. "So students can see their teachers behind the cash registers at McDonald's."

Council member George L. Leventhal (D-At Large) interrupted her, disbelief in his voice.

"Teachers are enlisted by McDonald's to work behind the cash register at McDonald's, and students are recruited to go to McDonald's that night to see their teacher dishing out the Big Macs?" he asked with horror. "I never heard of that."

About 20 minutes later, Leventhal spoke up again. "The McDonald's thing really bothers me a lot," he said, his sentiment partly fueled by a concern about childhood obesity. "I mean, I don't know if we'd have a fundraiser at the local cigarette store."

Schools receive a percentage of the sales from McTeacher's nights.

Sue Amick, president of the PTA of Cedar Grove Elementary School, one of a handful of the Montgomery campuses that have held McTeacher events, said she shares Leventhal's worries about childhood obesity. But she said she doesn't think such events are the problem.

"Offering one night at a restaurant is not going to cause a child to be obese," she said.

Council President Michael Knapp (D-Upcounty), who was also at the hearing, was unfazed. He said McTeacher's Nights have been held at his daughters' schools. "It's just a fun night out," he said.

McDonald's officials said in an e-mail: "Through our long-standing affiliation with educators, including the Maryland State Department of Education and Montgomery County Public Schools, we have developed and supported local initiatives that recognize academic achievement and support the well-being of children. For example, McTeacher's Night brings educators, students, parents, and friends together to raise money for a designated school-related cause."

Kate Harrison, a spokeswoman for the Montgomery school system, said it is up to PTAs to decide about fundraising events. "We're not going to get in the business of telling our parents where they can eat," she said.